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## INTRODUCTION

### Climate politics in small European states

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The national level has become increasingly important in the study and practice of climate politics. In its move towards a more bottom-up architecture, the Paris Agreement has ushered in a new focus on domestic policy through nationally determined contributions. Scholarly attention has seen a similar shift. Once principally the domain of international relations scholars, the study of climate change politics has paid increasing attention to the determinants of national action (Harrison and Sundstrom 2010, Steinberg and Vandeveer 2012, Cao *et al.* 2014). Starting from the premise that domestic politics and national governments have a key role to play in climate policymaking, this literature has focused on the politics of national climate legislation (Carter and Jacobs 2014, Lorenzoni and Benson 2014, Fankhauser *et al.* 2015a, 2015b Averchenkova *et al*. 2018, Torney 2018, Wagner and Ylä-Anttila 2018), carbon taxation (Harrison, 2010, 2012), and on broader sets of climate policy outputs and outcomes (Bernauer and Böhmelt, 2013, Boasson 2013, Christoff and Eckersley 2011, Compston and Bailey 2012, Jensen and Spoon 2011, Lachapelle and Paterson 2013, Tobin 2017).

Although much has been written about the politics of climate change at European and global levels, and with respect to some larger countries such as Germany, the UK, France, the United States, and China, fewer scholarly contributions have focused on small states. Smallness could be defined according to a range of criteria, such as geography or economy, but we define small states in relational terms, that is to say, on the basis of some meaningful criterion in a particular context (Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006). In the context of climate politics and policy, we consider a country's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) to be a relevant selection criterion. We identify 'small' states in this context as countries accounting

for no more than 0.5% of GHGs.[1] Large Annex I countries are the subject of at least five times as many political science, international relations, or public administration publications on climate policy and politics as small Annex I countries. An intra-European comparison of climate policy scholarship on large and small states shows that over twice as many publications feature nine large European states as feature 32 small European states. On average, each of these large European states is the subject of 55 such publications, ranging from 214 (the UK) to ten (the Ukraine), while the average small state features in eight publications, ranging from 42 (Norway) to zero in several cases (Web of Science 2018).[2] Thus, relatively little has been written about a large number of states. While this may be understandable, in that individually and collectively they account for a small proportion of the policy problem, it is nonetheless a weakness in the existing literature. These states collectively represent almost one-fifth of European emissions. From the perspective of comparative political science, we are missing opportunities to study and learn lessons from the diverse experiences of climate policy and politics in many small European states. This volume contributes to redressing the deficit in attention given to smaller states in the study of comparative climate politics.

As well as adding to climate politics research by examining under-studied cases, we also aim to examine how the characteristics of small states influence climate policy and politics. These characteristics generate multiple, albeit sometimes contradictory, expectations in relation to climate policy and politics. Small states, their governments, and their citizens may see themselves as being irrelevant to GHGs emissions (i.e., a 'drop in the ocean') and thus being without culpability or the means to respond. Being more open to forces of international competition, they may be more susceptible to a 'race to the bottom' on climate policy; their economies may be less diverse than those of larger states and in some cases this may lead to heavy reliance on GHG-intensive industries. On the other hand, states with small populations may be better equipped to sustain collective action on climate change; under some conditions small European states may be able to influence EU policy initiatives to an extent that is

[1] Annex I countries that contributed less than 0.5% to global greenhouse gas emissions in 2013 (taking account of land use change and forestry) were: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland. Annex I countries above this threshold (excluding the European Union) were Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Russia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States (CAIT-WRI, 2015).

[2] Searches for 'climate change' and cognate terms ('global warming', 'climate policy', 'climate politics', and 'greenhouse gas*') were carried out in July and August 2018 in the titles, keywords, and abstracts of publications classified as political science, international relations, or public administration in the *Web of Science*. Variants of country names (e.g., UK, United Kingdom, Britain) were used where necessary.

disproportionate to their size; and insofar as they are open economies, they may aim for competitive advantages in new technologies and industries. This volume is motivated by a desire to examine how these contradictory expectations play out in a diverse set of small European states.

Furthermore, our focus on small states is warranted because small state dilemmas are relevant both to small and large countries (Katzenstein 1985). For example, arguments concerning relevance and responsibility for global climate change exist in many larger industrial societies, including larger EU member states and even the United States.

In this introduction we set out our theoretical expectations regarding climate politics and policy outputs and outcomes in small European states. Drawing on the comparative climate politics literature as well as the literature on the political economy of small states, the next section identifies small state attributes that can both enable and constrain ambitious climate policies. Against this backdrop, we go on to highlight the empirical findings of the various contributions to the volume and explore the proposition that small states share certain distinctive characteristics that are relevant to climate politics and policy.

## Constraints and opportunities for small states

The literature on small states that has developed around the work of Peter Katzenstein (1985) has implications for both small state policy in the face of international challenges and the domestic politics of small states, not least in relation to internationalised issues that often present tensions with market forces. These implications include the degree of consensus in their climate politics and conflicting expectations concerning small state leadership and laggardship in climate policy outputs.

*Consensus-oriented politics* and convergent preferences in the face of external pressures are strong themes in research on small states. Katzenstein argued that small states are vulnerable due to geopolitical factors and their dependence on trade. This vulnerability provides the motivation, and their small size and corporatist institutions provide the means, for coordination among policymakers and other important actors, making for consensus-oriented, 'low voltage' or even 'unitary' politics, which 'makes political conflicts over basic political choices illegitimate' (Katzenstein 1985, pp. 32, 208-209). Consensus-oriented politics has in part been attributed to corporatist institutions, but has also been linked to smallness *per se*.

Keating (2015, pp. 16–17) emphasises the short lines of communication, a shared sense of purpose, and trust among governing elites as conditions that facilitate consensus in small states. Consensus, in turn, may facilitate policy consistency over time (e.g., Ingebritsen 2002), which can be conducive to stronger policy action on climate change due to the time horizons over which costs and benefits of such action play out. The apparent advantages for climate leadership of political consensus are reflected in both empirical research and policy recommendations (e.g., Brennan and Curtin 2008, p. 56, Flagg 2015). On the other hand, polarisation may lead to greater political constraints on decision-makers and greater inconsistency and policy uncertainty over time. This line of argument intersects with findings on climate policy that highlight the role of coordination in producing effective policy (Christoff and Eckersley 2011, Lachapelle and Paterson 2013, Ćetković and Buzogány 2016; see also Ingebritsen 2010).

The implications for *climate policy leadership* that can be drawn from the literature on small states are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, small state attributes may deter governments from climate policy leadership. Fundamentally, citizens and elites in small states may see their governments' domestic policy decisions as being practically irrelevant to global GHG emissions (Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006, p. 654), thus undermining the case for leadership. In addition, small states rely heavily on external markets; they are often policy- and market-takers; and they have a lower capacity to resist external pressure (Katzenstein 1985, Keating 2015). This too may lead them to eschew leadership positions on climate policy. Further, ambitious climate policies may be dampened by the domestic politics of small states: they may be prone to risk aversion or group-think (Keating and Harvey 2014: 62, Carolan 2017). Small state economies may be particularly likely to be heavily reliant on individual sectors and their policy processes may be prone to 'sectoral corporatism' (Lehmbruch 1984), constraining decision-makers and insulating policymaking from wider societal debates.

On the other hand, the distinctive characteristics of small states, particularly their responsiveness to market and regulatory developments, may lead them to act as innovators or test beds for new policy responses to climate change. The increasingly polycentric nature of climate governance, characterised by multiple more or less independent locations of decision-making, places a premium on innovations in climate governance (Jordan and Huitema 2014, Jordan *et al.* 2018). Small states may be particularly well equipped to act as climate policy innovators, with successful innovations spreading out from their initial source through learning

and other transfer mechanisms. Indeed, this focus on experimentation has been a hallmark of the literature on polycentric climate governance (Ostrom 2010, 2012, Dorsch and Flachsland 2017), although Jordan *et al.* (2015) caution that this optimistic take on polycentric governance rests on untested assumptions about the diffusion and performance of governance innovations. Small states may also be likely destinations to which innovations diffuse: small states are more open to international forces of coercion and competition, both from competitiveness pressures and from the impetus to develop comparative advantage, and may also be more likely to engage in emulation and learning (Katzenstein 2003, p.18, Simmons *et al.* 2006). Small state vulnerability may contribute to 'the greening of capitalism' (Ingebritsen 2010, p. 362).

There is some empirical evidence for small state leadership in climate policy. For example, small states were early adopters of carbon taxes: in the 1990s and 2000s, nearly all of the European countries that implemented carbon taxes at national level were small states (the one exception was Poland). Small European states have also tended to set their carbon prices at higher levels (World Bank, 2018; see also Andersen 2019). Taking a broader view of climate policy outputs and outcomes, small European states have tended to achieve somewhat higher values in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) than larger states in recent years (Burck et al., 2017; Figure 1). Moreover, public opinion in small European states has tended to indicate more concern about climate change and related environmental and energy issues than public opinion in larger states (European Commission 2018). Figure 2 illustrates that difference; a similar mean difference between small and large European states of approximately two percentage points is evident in responses to questions about the most important problem facing the EU and facing the respondent personally.[3]

<<<FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>>>

[3] Country selection is based on data availability in the CCPI and Eurobarometer. The countries covered by the Eurobarometer data in Figure 2 are all those for which data is available from 2005 to 2018; these are the EU-28 in 2018 and Turkey. Figure 1 covers the same countries, as well as Belarus, Norway, Switzerland, and the Ukraine. Russia is excluded, as it is both conceptually marginal to 'Europe' and empirically outlying as a climate laggard. One-tailed t-tests on the pooled CCPI observations indicate that the difference between small and large European states illustrated in Figures 1 is not statistically significant ($n$=373, $p$=0.19); however, they indicate that differences in public opinion between large and small state observations are statistically significant at < 0.01 ($n$ ranges from 450 to 724).

<<<FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE>>>

Each of the tendencies set out thus far has identified potential commonalities in the climate politics in small states. However, *diversity* among small states is widely acknowledged (e.g., Katzenstein 1985, 2003, p. 11, Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006, p. 655; Antunes and Loughlin 2018, p.5). Small European states include (neo-)corporatist states and others (Thorhallsson and Kattel 2013), social investment and market competition states (Keating and Harvey 2014), and Coordinated and Liberal Market Economies (Hall and Soskice 2001). While they are all parliamentary systems (Strom 2003), their institutions for representative politics also differ in important ways. These differences can be expected to influence how small states respond to global policy problems and they have been associated - with varying degrees of confidence and empirical evidence - with different approaches to climate policy (Christoff and Eckersley 2011, Lachapelle and Paterson 2013, Ćetković and Buzogány 2016). It may be that several of the features of climate politics discussed above are contingent on these institutional features, and not on state smallness alone.

**The contributions to this volume**

The contributions to this volume explore how the themes developed above, including consensus (and polarisation) in domestic climate politics and leadership and laggardship, as well as the role of corporatist institutions, play out in different small state contexts. The first two contributions examine *consensus and polarisation* on climate policy among political parties. Farstad (2019) compares the party politics of climate change in a large state (Australia) with a small European state (Norway), examining the possible effects of state size, while Ladrech and Little (2019) examine differences between two small European states (Denmark and Ireland) and variations within those states, emphasising diversity in the climate politics of small European states.

Farstad has a positive story to tell about small states and party consensus on climate policy. She asks whether and how state size has an effect on party consensus on climate policy. She compares a large state (Australia) and a small state (Norway) that are similar on several dimensions: both are major fossil fuel exporters, the cost of abatement in both countries is high,

and both of these wealthy countries were relatively unscathed by the global financial crisis. Yet, the party politics of climate change in Australia has become polarised, while there has been considerable consensus in Norway. On the basis of these case studies drawing on 44 interviews with policy practitioners, she concludes that geographic size conditions party behaviour on climate change, contributing – to a limited extent – to explanations of consensus (polarisation). Geographic size operates by underpinning inter-regional variation in economic interests, which further interacts with party ideology to accentuate polarisation. She also finds some evidence for the proposition that smallness facilitates shorter lines of communication and greater unity among elites. However, institutions matter more than size in both countries: while acknowledging a range of institutions that may contribute to consensus (polarisation) on climate change between and within parties, Farstad identifies corporatism as a key factor that conditions party preferences and behaviour on climate change by engendering coordination and consensus among interest groups and ENGOs.

Ladrech and Little begin from the observation that not only do parties' preferences on climate policy differ, they appear to depend on parties' positions on the left-right spectrum. They examine the roles of three factors in driving parties' climate policy preferences and left-right differences in those preferences: public opinion, party competition, and pre-existing policy preferences on traditional policy issues. Denmark and Ireland appear typical of the observed relationship between left-right politics and climate politics: Denmark is somewhat polarised in both its left-right politics and its climate politics (albeit with considerable variation over time), while in Ireland party preferences are more convergent. They find that public opinion and party competition had strong effects in shaping party preferences, but that these effects were uneven across the left-right spectrum in each country, with typically greater incentives to develop strong climate policy preferences on the left. The role of public opinion is exemplified both by the increased vote-seeking incentives to address the issue in both countries in the late 2000s and by how low public concern in Ireland has allowed parties to maintain relatively weak climate policy preferences. Party competition has driven accommodative behaviour towards successful issue-owners. They add to existing research that highlights the competitive dynamic that can occur between larger parties on climate policy (Carter and Jacobs 2014) by showing the – perhaps more typical – constraining effects of mainstream competition on climate policy.

They also show that parties' existing policy preferences on traditional issues, especially on economic issues, have a particularly important role to play in shaping parties' climate policy preferences, which helps to explain observed differences in climate policy preferences between parties of the left and right. The drivers of parties' preferences on climate policy have much in common with their incentives and constraints in other policy domains and there is little to suggest a generic imprint of 'small stateness' on the party politics of climate change. While the study detects some small-state-specific drivers – such as perceptions of national irrelevance to global greenhouse gas emissions among some politicians in Ireland – the case of Denmark shows that these are not universal or inevitable.

The next two contributions focus on *corporatism* in Nordic states. Ćetković and Skjærseth (2019) analyse the creative and disruptive elements of Norway's climate policy mix, distinguishing three main phases in its development. The first phase (1989–1995), termed 'symbolic destruction', emphasised cost-efficient stabilisation of domestic emissions. In the second phase (mid-1990s–2008) attention shifted towards incremental improvements in environmental efficiency. The third phase (since 2008) has been characterised by increasing efforts towards emissions reductions at home combined with intensive global climate diplomacy. However, they argue, the actual impact of these cumulative changes on climate policy has been limited. The authors demonstrate how the mixed efforts for mitigating climate change domestically and high activity in the global climate governance regime have been tied to Norway's political economy and foreign policy strategy as a small, open, social-investment economy. Their findings support the theoretical proposition that small corporatist economies are successful in incremental long-term adaptation but prone to ignore larger structural problems. Whereas Norway has achieved a remarkably stable climate policy consensus and has continuously encouraged the environmental improvements in the oil and gas sector, it has failed to formulate a plan for phasing out the oil and gas extraction and reduce the country's economic dependence on oil and gas exports.

Although Norway's climate policy can partly be described as symbolic, for instance the modest $CO_2$ tax, pressure to live up to its 'green' reputation has motivated Norway to undertake some more structural reforms such as the extensive promotion of electric vehicles. These progressive measures indicate that small social-investment economies like Norway may be more inclined to increase their climate policy efforts in the face of external pressure as they are

more dependent on stable international agreements and a progressive self-image than larger and more liberal-market-oriented economies such as Australia and Canada (see Cass 2008).

Gronow *et al*. (2019) compare two small Nordic states - Sweden and Finland - that are similar in many respects but differ with regard to both climate change policy outputs and outcomes. They seek to resolve the debate between those who argue that corporatism is associated with more ambitious environmental policies (for example, Christoff and Eckersley 2011) and those who maintain that corporatism can hinder rather than promote ambitious environmental policy (Dryzek et al. 2002). They suggest that, rather than treating corporatism either as a dichotomous macro-structural variable or a continuum on which all countries can be placed, the institution of corporatism should be divided into three components: inclusiveness, consensualism and strength of tripartite organisations. Gronow *et al*. maintain that although inclusiveness and consensualism are indeed conducive to ambitious environmental policy, tripartite strength may have the opposite effect. Their empirical findings suggest that Sweden and Finland are both characterised by relatively inclusive and consensual policymaking systems, but that in Finland, NGOs are less influential than tripartite organisations, whereas in Sweden the reverse is true. Finnish tripartite organisations are influential and occupy important positions in a resourceful coalition well linked to the government. This contrasts with Sweden, and appears to be the most important difference in the climate policy networks between the two countries.

The remaining three contributions address various aspects of *leadership and laggardship*, without dispensing with the themes of political consensus and corporatism. Andersen (2019) builds on the observation that small states have been front-runners in the adoption of carbon taxes to examine seven cases of the adoption of that policy instrument from a range of different contexts within the EU: the Nordic states (Sweden, Finland, and Denmark), central and eastern Europe (Slovenia and Estonia), and two 'cohesion' countries (Ireland and Portugal). Drawing on the concept of 'policy styles', he argues that, despite their differences, these cases are characterised by similarities that helped to make their contexts conducive to the adoption of carbon taxes. Two elements are central to his argument. First, five of the seven states were characterised by a deep-rooted national policy style involving routines of interest coordination applied to fiscal policy that allowed a proactive approach to taxation policy. In contrast to the contributions that precede it in this volume, neo-corporatist structures play a less prominent role than expected; rather, cultural norms concerning consultation and coordination

are the common denominator. Andersen observes that these countries frequently introduced carbon taxes as part of broader fiscal reforms, allowing those who were disadvantaged by the introduction of the tax to be compensated elsewhere. Second, their consensus-orientation was reinforced by another characteristic typical of small states: their proportional electoral systems, which broadened parliamentary representation, and which in some cases allowed environmentally-oriented parties to influence agenda-setting or the adoption of a carbon tax (e.g., in Denmark, Finland, and Ireland).

Braun (2019) finds evidence of climate leadership in his study of the role of the Czech Republic in EU climate change negotiations, including its coordination with the other members of the so-called Visegrad Group (V4, also including Poland, Hungary and Slovakia). The role of the central and eastern European member states in EU climate and energy policy has received some coverage in the scholarly literature, but less attention has been paid to the role the smaller Visegrad countries play in the development of EU climate policy. Braun argues that institutionalised cooperation within the V4 was a crucial component of their approach to the negotiations of the EU 2030 framework. The V4 countries managed to coordinate their positions during the negotiations on the 2030 framework, and several of the group's initial demands were reflected in the final package agreed upon by the European Council in October 2014. He utilises the concepts of rhetorical action and socialisation, arguing that the V4 group's appeal to economic fairness corresponds to the idea of rhetorical action since the demands for a burden-sharing agreement reflect a shared EU norm of economic solidarity. At the same time, the group's approach has been developed as a response to and in conflict with ideas of ecological modernisation that legitimise EU climate policy. The cooperation and frequent meetings between representatives of the V4 provide a potential platform for a process of socialisation that in this case reinforces norms that contradict the Europeanisation process. He concludes that the success of the Visegrad cooperation in EU climate and energy negotiations suggests that researchers should take this form of international cooperation seriously despite the limited levels of formal institution building within the V4.

Torney (2019), however, finds that domestic factors can constrain the positive impact of international pressure. He investigates the adoption of framework climate laws in two small European states, Ireland and Finland, both of which introduced national climate laws in 2015. He tests two propositions: first, that international pressure to act on climate change pushes policymakers to develop climate policies that draw on experiences from other jurisdictions;

and second, that interest group mobilisation and political contestation over climate policy will cause states to adopt weaker, more symbolic versions of pioneering policies in other jurisdictions.

In respect of the first proposition, the UK's 2008 Climate Change Act was a source of inspiration in the early stages of the legislative process, driven by international pressure to be seen to be acting on climate change. The lead-up, first to COP15 and later to COP21, created conditions in which policymakers wanted to be seen to be doing *something*. In respect of the second proposition, however, strong societal conflict led both Ireland and Finland to adopt weaker climate laws. Domestic interest groups mobilised to remove the most pioneering and ambitious parts of the UK model from legislative proposals, with the preferences of more powerful actors trumping NGO voices pushing for stronger legislation. In this respect, two key elements that facilitated passage of the UK Climate Change Act (Carter and Childs 2018) were absent in Ireland and Finland: support from large elements of business, and cross-party consensus on the need for strong climate legislation. Thus, expectations regarding smallness are only partially borne out. Competitiveness concerns underpinned by both countries being small, open economies were a strong constraint on the adoption of more ambitious legislation. On the other hand, consensus-based politics (in the case of Finland) did not facilitate the adoption of comparatively ambitious legislation (see also Gronow et al., 2019 – this volume).

Overall, the cases and perspectives explored in this volume illustrate the diversity that exists with respect to the expectations set out above. While consensus on climate policy is a prominent feature in some of the countries examined, such as Norway and Sweden, several other cases are characterised by significant political partisanship or deep-rooted societal contestation, including in Denmark, Ireland, Finland and the Czech Republic, among others. Corporatism - or its absence - is seen to play a role in shaping climate policy outcomes, but a nuanced picture emerges across our cases. Corporatism shapes outcomes most prominently in the Nordic countries, but even here there is significant variation, with stronger climate policy outcomes in Norway and Sweden than in Finland. Political institutions matter in other ways as well, including electoral institutions and informal institutional arrangements at the supranational level such as the Visegrad 4 group in which the Czech Republic is embedded. Depending on the constellation of actors and interests, small states can play varying roles in regional and global climate politics, including as leaders (e.g., Norway and Sweden), laggards (e.g., Ireland and Czech Republic) or somewhere in between (e.g., Finland). They can be

innovators and sources of policy diffusion, for example on carbon taxes, but they can also be at the receiving end of diffusion processes and may, along the way, modify or weaken policy innovations, as has been the case with climate legislation. The overall picture that emerges is one of diversity in climate politics and policy across small European states driven by a range of factors in which size has an occasional role.

This volume contributes to redressing the balance of scholarly attention in favour of small states. It touches on several least-studied states, not least in its inclusion of the case of carbon taxes in Portugal, Estonia, and Slovenia (Andersen), and climate policy development in the Czech Republic in the context of the broader V4 group (Braun). However, it also reinforces some existing trends that favour some small states over others. It covers small states that have received more attention, such as the Nordic states. Nonetheless, our observations in this Introduction concerning the uneven distribution of scholarly attention to climate policy in small states and the volume's findings, which emphasise diversity among these states, suggest that even within Europe there is considerable further work to be done to expand the empirical scope of the comparative study of climate policy and politics. In particular, future research could focus more attention on eastern and southern European small states. The net could also be cast wider to consider small states beyond Europe. Doing so would enable exploration of the mediating role played by EU membership in the climate politics of small European states. Furthermore, and building on the observations of Farstad (2019), more research is needed to unpack the relationship between state size defined in terms of emissions, geography, and political institutions. Finally, with one exception (Farstad 2019), this volume has focussed on comparisons among small states. Future work on the role of state size in climate politics may focus on large-small comparisons. The diversity among small states illustrated in this volume, however, suggests that any effects of size sought by such studies are likely to be conditional and complex.

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**Figures**

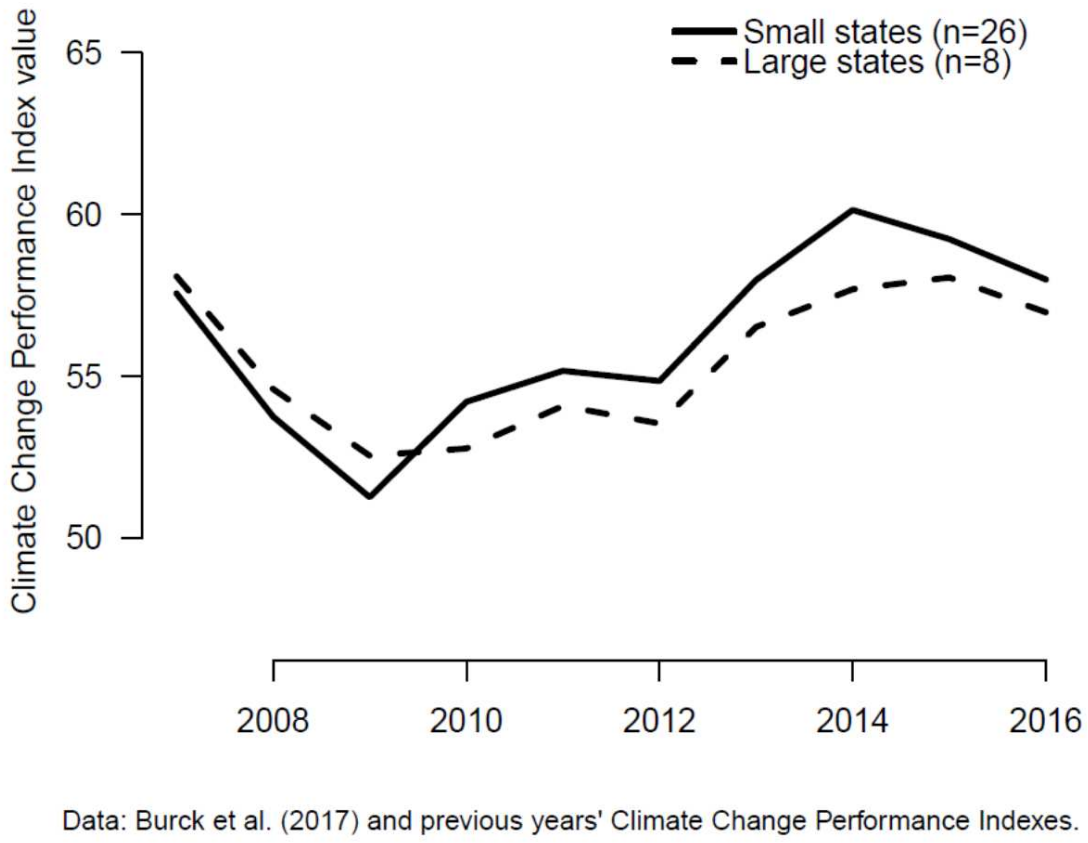


*Figure 1. Mean values of small and large European states in the Climate Change Performance Index.*

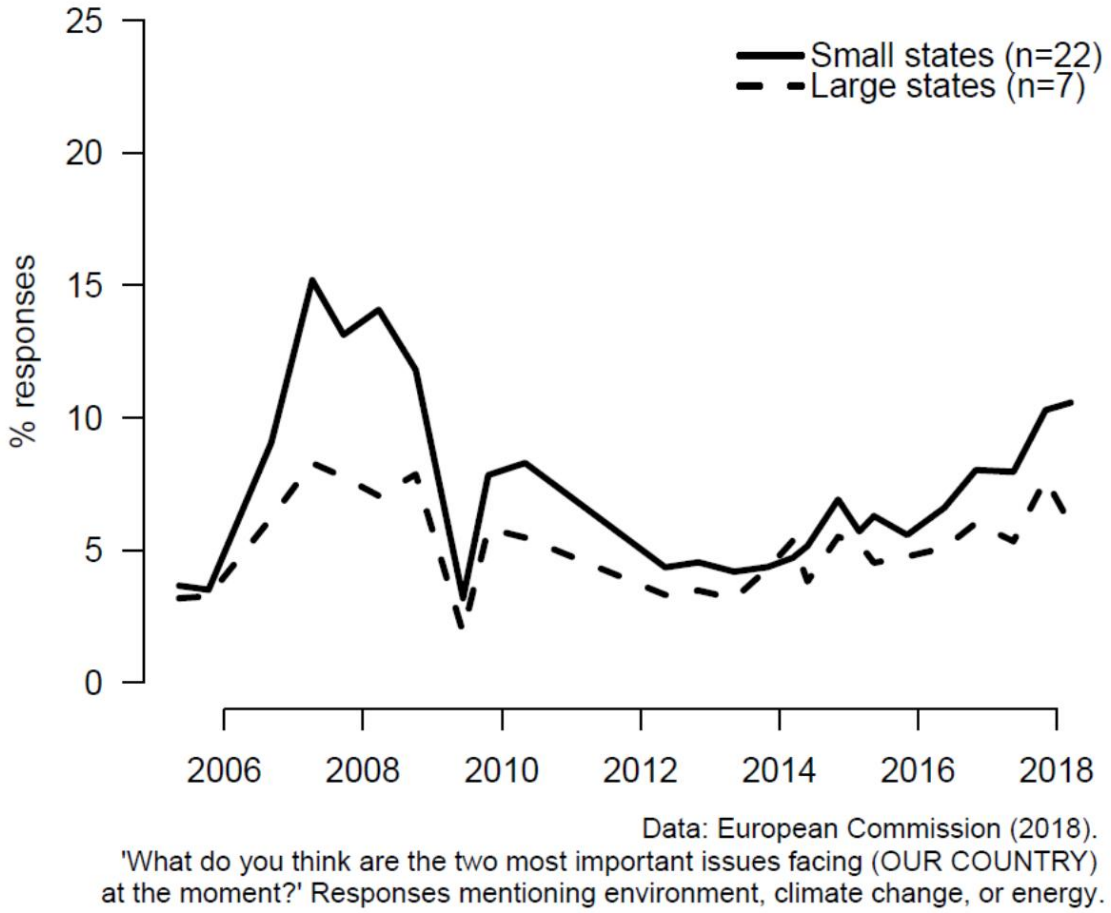


*Figure 2. Public concern about the environment, climate change, and energy in small and large European states.*